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Rescue Failure Update

JANE PAULEY: For the first time in 175 days, Iran says there are no hostages in the American Embassy in Tehran. They have been moved to various locations around the city by the militants, who intended to disperse them all over the country to make a second rescue attempt even harder.

"The bodies of the eight Americans who died in the aborted rescue mission will be returned to the United States," says President Bani-Sadr, "with no condition." The Americans were killed at their desert staging area in Eastern Iran. We have the first film of the landing site now from NBC Defense Department correspondent Hilary Brown.

HILARY BROWN: This film, shot by Iranian television, shows what was left behind by the rescue team at Desert One, the Pentagon's term for the refueling point along a remote desert road 200 miles east of Tehran.

A senior military officer revealed today that after the decision to scrub the operation, they had planned to fly all the aircraft out; but because of the explosion set off when one of the choppers crashed into a cargo plane, they decided that it was too risky.

In this film, Iranians show a wad of local money found on the scene. US officials admitted that secret documents and sensitive communications and electronics gear were probably left behind. The officials also reveal that, along with a busload of Iranians detained at the site, there were two trucks, and that the passengers, believed to be smugglers, actually got away in one of them, even after the American troops shot out the engine of the other.

Had the mission proceeded to its next stage, those Iranians could conceivably have given the team away. There was also one official clue as to what might have been had the team gone on. After refueling, the helicopters were to land in the mountains above Tehran and stand by, waiting for the signal to fly into the embassy compound.

Published reports speculate that the commandoes, meanwhile, would move in on the embassy by road, with the option of using non-lethal chemical weapons to incapacitate the hostages and their captors. Administration officials have hinted that for this the team could have help from non-Americans inside Tehran.

On signal, the reports go on, the choppers would have landed in the compound, which has a football field. The hostages would have been lifted out to an airstrip outside Tehran, where the transport planes would be waiting to fly them to freedom.

But instead, there was destruction and death before the rescue even began. Pentagon officials still can't explain why the chopper crashed into the cargo plane, even though they both were equipped with night sights. They can't explain why three out of eight helicopters broke down. This was an abnormally high failure rate, they say, which they can only put down to sheer bad luck. To have used more choppers would have compounded the margin of error, they say, and heightened the risk of discovery. And though they managed to avoid detection by Iranian armed forces, they chose to land beside a road where they were seen by 50 Iranian civilians within minutes of their arrival.

Defense officials remain tight-lipped about the final stages of the rescue plan because, they say, they want to preserve its tactics and techniques for possible future use. But with the

hostages now reportedly dispersed in cities throughout Iran, it's hard to see how they will ever have another chance.

Tehran Radio Report on Attempt

PAULEY: Tehran radio, monitored in London, said a booby trap was in one of the American helicopters. It said a patrol carried a box out of the copter, and the box exploded, killing one guard and wounding two others.

The radio report also said that three of the copters left by the Americans were destroyed by the Iranian army.

Rescue Team Wounded Returned

PAULEY: Four members of the volunteer rescue force were burned when the cargo plane collided with the helicopter. The Defense Department said today that a fifth man suffered a minor leg injury. All of them were flown to military hospitals in Texas today. Bob Jimenez reports.

BOB JIMENEZ: A small crowd and a military band welcomed the five injured men, two Marine majors, an Air Force lieutenant and two Air Force enlisted men. Two of the men were unofficially listed in serious condition; the others are in stable condition.

Twenty-one-year-old Airman First Class William Tootle suffered only a leg injury. He'll be treated at an Air Force clinic here. But the other four, some badly burned, were brought to the Brook Army Medical Center Burn Unit at Fort Sam Houston. Doctors here have perfected the use of skin grafts and anti-infection cream. The military says it is the best in the country.

First off the medevac was 34-year-old Marine Major Leslie Petty of Jacksonville, North Carolina. A family member says he may have been the pilot of the helicopter that crashed into the C-130. Next, 37-year-old Air Force Staff Sergeant Joseph

Beyers of Charleston, South Carolina, the most severely injured, with second and third degree burns over 40 percent of his body.

Thirty-six-year-old Marine Major James Schaefer Jr. of Los Angeles; his role and extent of injuries are unknown. Finally, 26 year-old Air Force First Lieutenant Jeffrey Harrison of Warren, Ohio has burns on only five percent of his body. He may have been the pilot or co-pilot of the C-130 cargo plane.

Despite the failure of the rescue mission, these men were welcomed home as heroes.

Rescue Team Deaths

PAULEY: Captain Charles Thomas McMillan was one of the eight men who died. He was the navigator of the plane that collided with a chopper during what the Pentagon calls the extraction. Today Kenley Jones talked to his father in Corryton, Tennessee.

KENLEY JONES: Three of the Marines who were killed and one who was injured during the rescue attempt were based at the New River Air Station near Camp LeJeune, North Carolina. Training continues there today, in helicopters similar to those used in the rescue mission.

The widows of the victims remain secluded on the base. The base commander said they were too upset to talk to newsmen.

One of the victims was Staff Sergeant Dewey Johnson. The injured Marine is Major Leslie Petty, who posed with his wife shortly before he went overseas. The parents of another victim, Air Force Captain Charles Thomas McMillan, called their only child Tom. A graduate of the Air Force Academy, Captain McMillan was the navigator of the C-130 cargo plane that collided with one of the helicopters during the rescue attempt. McMillan was killed in the flaming crash.

His mother was in seclusion today at home outside Knoxville. His father talked to reporters. His mother said Tom was